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NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0084
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 000049

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO AMCONSUL ALMATY
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/29

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SUBJECT: Bible Society of Uzbekistan faces Uncertain Future

REF: 09 TASHKENT 1573; 08TASHKENT 821

CLASSIFIED BY: Holly Lindquist Thomas, P/E Officer, Tashkent; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary: Sergei Mitin, Chairperson of the Bible Society of Uzbekistan, spoke to poloff on January 22 to discuss continued problems with fulfilling its mission in Uzbekistan. Although Mitin is not yet ready to throw in the towel, he and others in the World Congress of United Bible Society are starting to question the future of the organization. Mitin will be meeting with the Ambassador on February 2. End summary.

12. (SBU) Mitin has sent three letters to the Religious Affairs Committee (RAC) since November requesting assistance. The first letter proposed a meeting to negotiate a settlement of the ongoing dispute over a shipment of Bibles in the Russian, Uzbek, and Karakalpak languages that the GOU confiscated in June 2008. (See reftels.) Mitin would like to see whether authorities would allow the Russian-language materials in exchange for sending the remainder to another location. (Note: The same Russian-language materials were allowed in 2007, so it is reasonable to think they might be allowed again. The problem seemed to arise because of the Uzbek and Karakalpak materials.) The second letter requested permission for a new shipment of approximately 3,000 books, consisting of Russian-language Bibles in about 59 different formats (some for children, some with illustrations, different prints, etc.). The third letter requested permission to locally publish the Book of Isaiah in Uzbek for the first time.

13. (C) On January 20, Mitin spoke with Deputy Director of the RAC, Bekzot Kadyrov about his requests. On the issue of the impounded shipment, Kadyrov told him that the Director of the RAC, Ortigbek Yusupov, would only agree to discuss the impounded books if it is to determine where the shipment will be sent, outside of the borders of Uzbekistan. He said there would be no discussion of allowing those materials into the country.

14. (C) In response to Mitin's request to bring in another shipment and to publish the book of Isaiah, Kadyrov said that the

applications for both these requests must include a list of churches and pastors who want the materials, with an explanation of why they want them and to whom they will be distributed. This is the first time such information has been requested. Mitin was dismayed at this request, concerned that providing such information will bring unwanted attention to the pastors who request the books, and could even be the basis for allegations of proselytizing. He feels he cannot ask pastors to supply such information.

15. (C) Mitin, recently returned from a conference of the World Congress of United Bible Societies in Minsk, is contemplating the continued existence of the Bible Society of Uzbekistan. The Society's legally recognized activities are translating, publishing, and distributing religious materials. If it is unable to conduct these activities, there is little reason for continued operations. Other representatives at the World Congress apparently agree, and look at the coming months as a key period for the organization. Mitin says that the request for the new shipment of Russian Bibles will be a litmus test. If the shipment is not approved, he will have to be to consider closing up shop. (Interestingly, the Chairperson of the Bible Society in Kazakhstan said he would be eager to accept the shipment of materials currently held by authorities if they are not allowed in Uzbekistan.)

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16. (C) Comment: According to its website, the Bible Society of Uzbekistan is the only registered interdenominational Christian organization in the country. It has been registered since 1994. Its loss would be one more sign that religious organizations cannot operate freely in Uzbekistan. Despite the GOU's reluctance to include religious freedom in ABC discussions, however, it seems doubtful that they want to see this organization die, particularly in light of the negative international intention it would bring. Part of the problem here is that the parties have become entrenched over the impounded shipment of Bibles. If Mitin agrees to send the shipment to Kazakhstan, he may have more negotiating room on the other issues of concern. Mitin has requested a meeting with the Ambassador, which we will use to explore new ways to assist in the context of our expanding bilateral dialogue with Uzbekistan. End comment.

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